

RECORD EXPUNGEMENT DESIGNED TO ENHANCE EMPLOYMENT (REDEEM) ACT

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, earlier this month, Senator RAND PAUL and I introduced the Record Expungement Designed to Enhance Employment—or REDEEM—Act, a bill that takes important new steps to ensure that youth and adults caught up in the criminal justice system have an opportunity at a second chance to turn their lives around rather than returning to a life of crime. I thank Senator PAUL for joining with me to craft this legislation.

This important bipartisan legislation would establish much needed, sensible, pragmatic reforms that keep kids out of an adult system in the first place, protect their privacy so a youthful mistake does not haunt young people throughout their lives, and make it less likely that low-level nonviolent offenders reoffend.

As the former mayor of Newark, I believe strongly in holding people accountable for breaking our laws, but I also believe it is important that we do everything possible to ensure that when people leave prison and return to their communities, they have every chance at becoming productive members of our society. No one deserves more of an opportunity to leave their past behind than our children. Far too often, kids are easily manipulated into making a youthful mistake that should not follow them for the rest of their lives. That is why I advocate that we fix our Nation's broken criminal justice system, a system that has taken an unimaginable and I believe unsustainable toll on families and communities.

The United States is home to between 4 and 5 percent of the entire globe's population, but we have 25 percent of the world's prison population. This phenomenon is unacceptable, that the land of the free would have 25 percent of the globe's imprisoned people. What is startling about that is the majority of those people are nonviolent offenders. In fact, the majority are nonviolent drug offenders.

This phenomenon has largely emerged since around 1980, a period during which the Federal prison population has grown nearly tenfold. Since 1980 we have seen a 10-time increase in our prison population. The sad reality is that nearly three-quarters of Federal prisoners are nonviolent and have no history of violence whatsoever.

What is worse and what is anguishing is that once they are convicted of a crime, American citizens then face daunting obstacles to successfully rejoin society, to being able to raise their family, put food on the table, provide for themselves. As a result of that, our State and Federal prison exits have now become revolving doors, with two of every three ex-offenders getting rearrested within 5 years. Two-thirds of those nonviolent folks leaving our prisons come back within 5 years.

When ex-offenders return to prison again and again, they are not just paying a price; we all pay the price. We are contributing so much of our resources to rearresting the same people over and over, to reincarcerating the same people over and over. A recent Pew report concluded that if just 10 States cut their recidivism just 10 percent, taxpayers would save \$470 million—money this Nation could use to either return to taxpayers or invest in our crumbling infrastructure.

To further public safety, reduce recidivism, and protect the future of our children, I am proud to reintroduce the REDEEM Act. This bill would incentivize States to raise the age of original jurisdiction for criminal courts to 18 years old. Trying juveniles who have committed low-level, non-violent crimes as adults is counterproductive. They do not emerge from prison reformed and ready to reintegrate into a high school. The criminal record they have will not help them as they try to get a job. We need a system that treats juveniles toughly and fairly, with an eye toward a productive adulthood.

This change in law is important for protecting our children's futures. For kids in the dozen States that treat 17- and even 16-year-olds as adults, no longer would getting into a schoolyard scuffle result in an adult record that could follow an individual for the rest of their life, restrict access to a college degree, limit employment prospects, and increase the likelihood of engaging in further criminal activity.

The bill would enhance Federal juvenile record confidentiality and provide for automatic expungement of records for kids who commit nonviolent crimes before they turn 15 and automatic sealing of records for those who commit nonviolent crimes after they turn 15.

The bill would ban the very cruel and counterproductive practice of juvenile solitary confinement that can have immediate and long-term detrimental effects on youth detainee mental and physical health. In fact, the majority of suicides by juveniles in prisons occur when young people are placed in solitary confinement. Other nations even consider it torture.

The bill would, for adults, offer the first broad-based Federal path to the sealing of criminal records. A person who commits a nonviolent crime will be able to petition a court and make his or her case.

The bill would enhance the accuracy of criminal justice records. Employers requesting a background check from the Federal Bureau of Investigation will be provided with only relevant and accurate information thanks to a provision that will protect job applicants by improving the quality of the Bureau's background check. Think about this: 17 million background checks were done by the FBI in 2013, many of them for private providers, and upward of half of them were inaccurate or incomplete, often causing people to lose

a job, miss an economic opportunity, and be trapped with few economic options other than to reoffend in order to feed a child.

Finally, the bill would lift a ban on receiving Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits. The intent of this program is to keep low-income families from going hungry. Yet those convicted of drug use or possession lose the right to obtain such benefits. Once an individual has paid his or her debt to society, a path to the reinstatement of those benefits should be available. As President George W. Bush said in his 2004 State of the Union Address, "America is the land of the second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life." This bill would do just that.

Taken together, these measures will help keep kids who get in trouble out of a lifetime of crime and help adults who commit nonviolent crimes become more self-reliant and less likely to reoffend. This bill is supported by 27 organizations, including: the ACLU, the National Employment Law Center, the Sentencing Project, the Center for Children Law and Policy, the Legal Action Center, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the General Board of Church and Society, National Juvenile Justice Network, and the National Catholic Social Justice Lobby.

The time to act is now. We cannot afford to let our criminal justice system continue to grow at the rate that it is. We cannot afford to sap billions of taxpayer dollars from a broken system that is locking people up and then doing nothing to empower them to succeed. We cannot afford to waste human potential and human productivity.

We have seen how other individual States—like Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina—are taking significant steps to address this issue and are lowering both recidivism and the size of their prison population, while at the same time lowering actual crime in their States. It is time that the Federal Government act to do the same.

I urge my fellow Senators to support the REDEEM Act so we can make our communities safer and stronger and empowers our citizens to live productive and strong lives of contribution.

WORLD WAR II VETERANS VISIT

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the distinguished veterans of Honor Flight Northern Colorado who recently made their 13th trip to Washington, DC to visit the memorials that stand in our Nation's Capital. This group includes veterans from multiple wars and different generations, linked together by their service to our Nation.

Founded in 2005, the Honor Flight Program was originally formed to honor veterans of World War II but has since expanded to include those who have served in all other American engagements. This program provides an